Government Museum Madras

GOVERNMENT MUSEUM MADRAS

An Introduction

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GOVERNMENT MUSEUM, MADRAS

The Government Museum, Madras is the largest and oldest of the state museums in India. Since the time of its inception in 1851, it had steadily developed and expanded under the able guidance and supervision of a succession of devoted directors. Beginning as a museum of practical Geology, its scope was soon extended to cover other fields such as Archaeology, Ethnology, Prehistory, and Natural History. Its first officer-in-charge was Surgeon Edward Green Balfour, who launched an intensive collection campaign in order to build up the collections in the various sections of the Museum. Others who followed him carried on his magnificient work further to make this Museum the repository of outstanding objects of art and fine specimens of natural history.

With the merger of the Pudukkottai State into the then Madras State in 1951, the Pudukkottai Museum also became administratively annexed to the Government Museum, Madras. The Salem Museum, established earlier at Salem by a Committee with the Collector of the district as its Chairman, was taken over in 1979 and reorganised as the Government Museum, Salem. In January 1981, the Government Museum, Madurai was opened at Madurai. Within the next few years a network of district museums will be set up in Tamil Nadu.

In 1951, the Government Museum, Madras celebrated its centenary, having completed hundred years of fruitful service to the public as a pioneer educational institution in the State. The Centenary celebrations were inaugurated by the then Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, on November 27, 1951. The National Art Gallery was also organised and thrown open to the public on the occasion.

There was a spurt in the reorganisation and development of the Museum in 1963 with generous financial assistance from the Government of Madras resulting in the new Bronze Gallery, a new Natural History wing and an extension of the Chemical Conservation Laboratory being set up. A Gallery of Buddhist Antiquities was opened in 1964 and a Philatelic Gallery was opened in 1966. A Numismatics Gallery was set up in 1976

The Madras Museum is a large multi-purpose museum covering a wide range of subjects and is organised into the following sections: Archaeology and Art, Anthropology, Numismatics, Zoology, Botany and Geology. In addition to these, there is a well-equipped Chemical Laboratory for the conservation of museum objects and an Education Section for carrying out the educational activities of the Museum. Each of these sections is in charge of a qualified Curator who is a specialist in his own field. These sections contain extensive collections illustrating mostly the past history, culture and natural history of South India.

ARCHAEOLOGY

The Archaeological Section of the Museum is noted for its rich collections of South Indian art, which attract scholar and layman by their artistic excellence and variety. The Section

Women Worshipping Buddha's feet, Amaravati, 150 A. D.

deals with the acquisition, preservation, study and display of sculptures, antiquities and allied objects pertaining to the various periods of South Indian history. The exhibits in this section

consist of sculptures in stone and metal, inscriptions on stone and metal, architectural pieces, paintings, wood-carvings, metal-ware and a few original manuscripts. The most ancient antiquities of the historical period of South India consist mainly of Buddhist relics of which the beautiful Bhattiprolu crystal reliquaries and the inscribed stone casket which contained them deserve special mention. The Buddhist sculptures from Amaravati which adorn an entire gallery in this Museum constitute by far the most interesting and important record not only of the development of the artistic activities of South India during the five centuries from about 200 B. C. to about 300 A. D. but also about the social life of the people of those times. The galleries devoted to South Indian bronzes constitute another remarkable part of this section. The Museum possesses one of the world's richest collection of bronzes, many of which are superb specimens of South Indian Art. Of these the most notable ones are the images depicting the Dance of Siva (Nataraja) from Tiruvalangadu and the group consisting of Rama, Lakshmana, Sita and Hanuman from Vadakkuppanaiyur. The Museum's rich collection of bronzes is now displayed in the Bronze Gallery in a spacious three-storeyed building. This was opened in September, 1963.

ANTHROPOLOGY

The Madras Museum is among the earliest of institutions in India and abroad where Ethnology and Prehistoric Archaeology are represented as museum subjects. The first Palaeolith in India from Attirampakkam, Chengalpattu District discovered in 1863 by Bruce Foote, and acquired in 1904 is one of a large collection of prehistoric antiquities possessed by this Museum. An earlier collection acquired in 1878 from J. W. Breeks from the Nilgiris consists of exotic-looking pottery, beads, ornaments, iron implements and bronze vases. The Museum also possesses large collections of Iron Age pottery, iron tools, bronze utensils and gold ornaments excavated at Adichanallur in Tirunelveli District and Perumbair in Chengalpattu

District, and the Stone Age collections made later by Mr. F. P. Manley and others have considerably augmented the Museum's reserves so that prehistoric antiquities of this Museum constitute one of the richest collections in the world today. Besides the Museum possesses a large ethnographic collection representative of the tribal and rural cultures of the people of Southern India. This includes tribal dwellings, utensils and implements used by tribal folk, their dress, weapons and ornaments. These have been augmented by such interesting additions as the Kathakali figures representing the dance drama of Kerala, shadow play figures of Kerala and Andhra, models of Lambadi and Gadaba women to illustrate their dress and other objects pertaining to the material culture of these picturesque tribes. These exhibits have been attractively displayed in modernised, built-in, illuminated cases.

Female Figurine
Adichanallur

NUMISMATICS

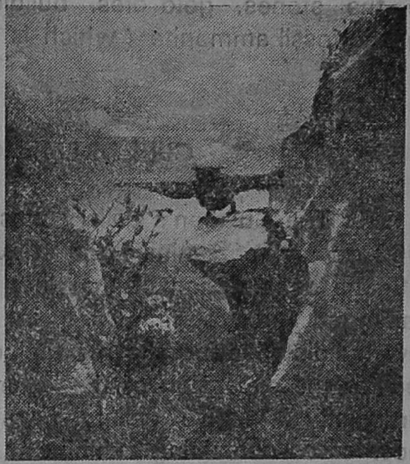
The Madras Museum is noted for its large and unique collection of coins, particularly of South Indian and Mughal coins. The Gupta coins are specially interesting, being mostly of gold and bearing inscriptions in classical Sanskrit which appear for the first time on Indian coinage. A very rare find acquired by the Madras Museum was a hoard from Dowlaishweram, a place near Rajahmundry, consisting of 127 gold coins, 49 of which belong to the Eastern Chalukyan ruler, Raja Raja I and the rest to his son Kulothunga Chola. This section has also a good collection of historical documents, seals and medals. A Numismatic Gallery was opened in 1975 in a room on the first floor of the Bronze Gallery. For reasons of securit/, only metal casts of important

coins have been displayed. A few medals, seals and documents are also on show.

This Museum was also the first to organise a Philatelic Gallery, which has a collection of more than 45,000 stamps from all countries of the world.

ZOOLOGY

The Zoological Section is one of the largest sections in the Museum, handling the collection, preservation, storage and display of all types of animal forms from the lowly organized one-celled protozoan to the gigantic whale. Although its scope is mainly limited to South Indian fauna a few interesting specimens of foreign animals and birds, especially a few beautiful birds of remarkably brilliant plumage such as the mandarin duck, macaw parrot, tragopan, monal and the golden pheasant have been added to enrich the collections particularly in recent years. A part of the Bird Gallery is now housed in the ground floor of the New Natural History Block to facilitate the modernisation of the main Bird Gallery in the old buildings.



The Indian Great Horned Owl
(Diorama)

BOTANY

The Botanical Galleries include systematic, ecological and economic sections. In the Gallery of Economic Products, a large number of vegetable raw materials, forest products, timbers, indigenous medicinal herbs and cottage industry products are

exhibited. A large cross-section of a teak tree trunk showing tree rings extending back to 500 years of history is an impressive exhibit. The Economic Products Gallery is being reorganised thoroughly on modern lines.

GEOLOGY

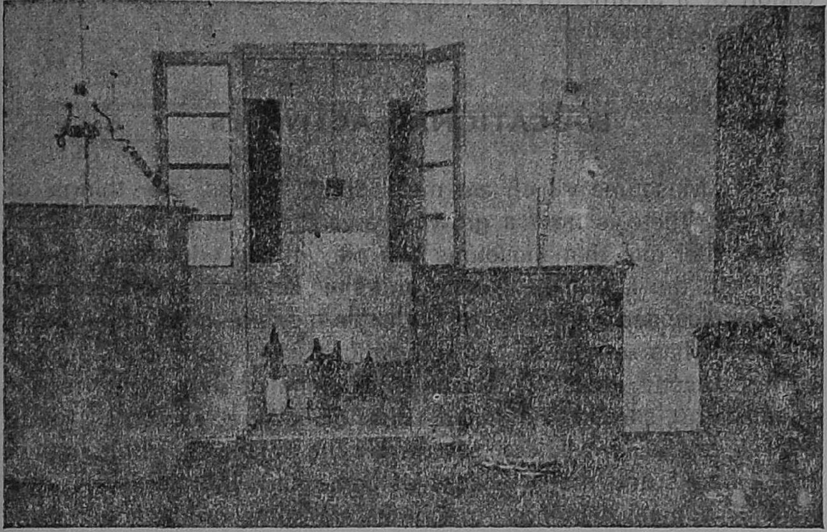
The Geological Gallery is a veritable treasure house of Indian minerals and has been recently rearranged so as to present the layman with a fairly complete picture of stratigraphy and the range and variety of the mineral wealth of India. Some exhibits which specially attract the attention of visitors in this gallery are the stones, gold ores, building stones, meteorites and a gigantic fossil ammonite (which is allied to the living cuttlefish).

CHILDREN'S GALLERY

The Children's gallery was thrown open to the public in 1969 on the mezzanine floor above the Geology Gallery, and with the construction of the New Natural History Block, it was rearranged and accommodated in the mezzanine floor of this new building leaving the mezzanine floor of the Geology Gallery free for the expansion of the latter. The Children's Gallery is a particularly attractive gallery consisting of modern illuminated show cases containing exhibits of special appeal to children. By suitable arrangements, a certain amount of continuity has been achieved in the sequence of exhibits. The exhibits on display begin with an instructive portrayal of the story of the origin of the earth followed by a case illustrating the mineral wealth of India, and a series of dioramas illustrating prehistoric animals in miniature, set against attractive backgrounds depicting their natural haunts, the story of primitive man and his tools and the variety of animal life on the earth. The physiology of man and some animals, and the story of transport, are also graphically exhibited in suitable settings. Two working models of trains picturesquely laid out in show cases and one working model of a telephone are also on display.

CHEMICAL CONSERVATION

The Museum possesses a well-equipped chemical laboratory which was the first museum laboratory for chemical conservation to be set up in the country. This was expanded in



View of the electrolytic cells

1963. This Laboratory deals with the treatment and conservation of valuable antiquities and works of art, received by the Museum from time to time, by means of modern chemical and electrolytic methods.

RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS

Research has always been a dominant feature of the activities of this Museum. The results of the researches carried out in the various sections have been published from time to time, notably in the Bulletins of the Madras Government Museum, which have raised the prestige of the Museum considerably in the eyes of scholars and have brought in several foreign periodicals by way of exchange. The Museum has to its credit a commendable series of Bulletins both in natural history and humanities. Most of these publications are valuable monographs

and serve as standard reference works in the respective subjects, but apart from these scholarly monographs, several popular guide books and handbooks have also been brought out. The Museum also issues a Half-yearly Newsletter outlining its latest additions and programmes of educational activities. The publication of a Journal of the Madras Government Museum will be commenced shortly.

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Museums which are mere show places are things of the past. There is now a growing awareness, all over the world, of the vital role that museums can play in the education of the child and the adult, the literate and the illiterate, the able and the handicapped. In keeping with this modern trend, the Madras Museum has expanded its educational activities considerably during recent years. Special exhibitions of important recent acquisitions, special illustrated talks to college students, guide service to the lay visitors, sale of picture postcards, photographs, guide books and metal replicas of coins and bronze icons and loan of original paintings to schools are some of the educational services offered by this Museum. The Museum also runs short-term courses in the care of Museum objects and in taxidermy. By such means we are attempting to make the Museum more meaningful and enjoyable to the lay public.

REORGANISATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MUSEUM

The establishment of a Children's Museum in a separate three-storyed building, to be constructed adjacent to the National Art Gallery is under way. The Economic Products Gallery, the Geology Gallery and the Skeleton Gallery are being reorganised with specially-built modern show cases. It is proposed to reorganise the National Art Gallery and the Bronze Gallery. The Amaravati Gallery will be expanded and reorganised. A new canteen will be set up in a new building within a short time.

GENERAL INFORMATION ON FACILITIES, ETC.

The Museum and the National Art Gallery are open from 8 a. m. to 5 p. m. on all days except Fridays and National Holidays (Republic Day, Independence Day and Gandhi Jayanthi). Admission to the Museum and the Art Gallery is by tickets at the following rates :-

Adults	0.50 P. each
Children (below 12 years)	0.25 P. each
Parties of children from schools with letters from the headmasters or principals	0.10 P. each.

Free guide service is available at the entrance to the Museum, the Bronze Gallery and the Art Gallery at certain specified hours (10-30 a.m., 2 Noon, 2 p. m., and 4 p.m.) for those who are interested in availing themselves of such facility. Parties of students are specially invited to take advantage of this facility.

Visitors are permitted to take photographs on payment of Rs. 2/-. (except bronzes). Photography tickets are available at the Sales Counter.

The publications, photographs and picture post cards brought out by the Museum are available at the sales counter at the entrance of the Museum.

The Museum is also equipped with an auditorium, called the Museum Theatre, with a seating capacity of about 530 persons and a spacious stage suitable for concerts and dramatic performances. The Theatre is primarily intended for educational lectures and for cultural programmes organised under the auspices of the Government. When not thus required, it may be used for educational purposse, and amateur theatrical performan-

ces at rates and on conditions approved by the Government. Film shows for the public are arranged at 3 p.m. on all Saturdays and Sundays at the Theatre. Admission to these film shows is free.

The Centenary Exhibition Hall in the Museum is used frequently for temporary exhibitions and lectures and is let out to cultural institutions, societies etc., for their meetings, annual functions and for exhibitions on payment of a nominal fee subject to the rules and regulations approved by the Government.